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SPECIAL REPORT

OF THE

Medical Officer of Health,

TO THE VESTRY OF

ST. MARY, NEWINGTON, SURREY,

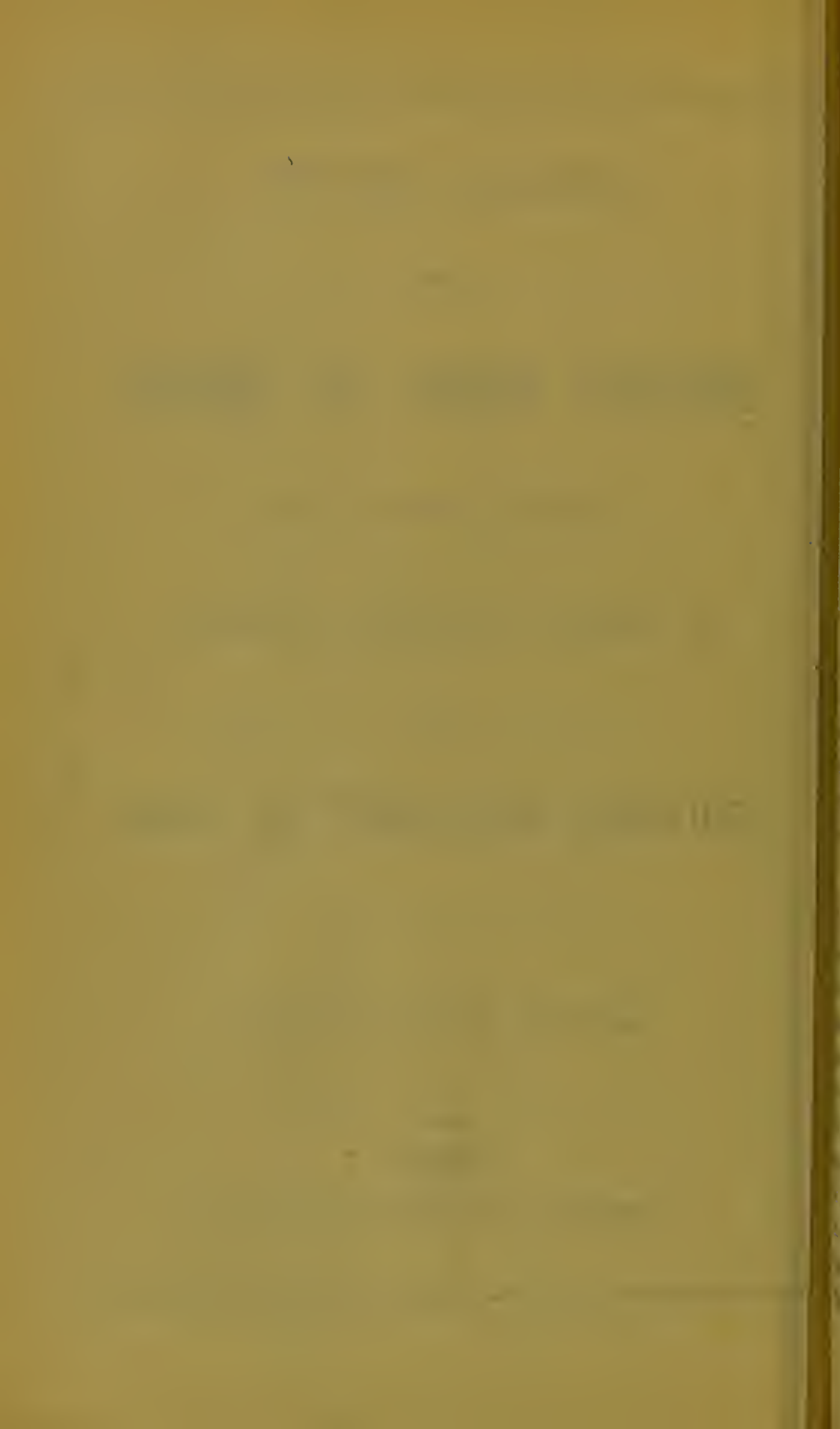
ON THE

CHOLERA EPIDEMIC OF 1866.

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TO THE

SPECIAL SANITARY COMMITTEE

OF THE

Parish of St. Mary, Newington.

GENTLEMEN,

The return of the Cholera in 1854, only five years after its former appearance, naturally gave rise to the fear that we might suffer from its ravages again a few years later; and therefore, as each year rolled on, rumours arose of the near approach of this much dreaded disease. Happily, however, it did not show itself until this year, although a few isolated cases ever and anon appeared.

In June 1866, at length, there seemed to be good reason to believe the advent of this epidemic was near at hand, and the Association of Medical Officers of Health issued a memorandum containing practical suggestions such as they, after much consideration, had adopted as important. On the 13th a fatal case occurred in our Parish, at 6, Swan Court; and the next day the Governors and Guardians of St. Mary, Newington, directed that all persons suffering from Diarrhœa should be supplied with medicine at the Dispensary by the Workhouse without the necessity of a surgeon's order. In July, however, the presence of Cholera in an epidemic form was admitted to be beyond doubt, and the mortality in London therefrom in the first, second, and third weeks was 14, 32, 346. Meetings of the Privy Council were

held, and on the 21st a general order was issued calling attention to the necessity for immediate and active exertion. On the 18th of July the Vestry had sanctioned the issue of 1000 large bills, containing sanitary suggestions, and advice more especially relating to Cholera.

On July 25th the Privy Council's order was received, and a Special Meeting of the Vestry was summoned for the 28th; and at its meeting an unanimous desire was expressed that no time should be lost in making those arrangements which might tend to meet, and it was hoped to overcome, the pressing emergency, and a Committee for this purpose was appointed.

On the 31st this Committee held its first meeting, and from that time continued in operation, assembling at first twice a week, and afterwards once a week.

Dr. CORTIS was appointed Chairman, and from him I have throughout received the most willing and valuable assistance, and amongst the Committee themselves I have met with but one feeling, viz., an anxiety to promote in every way all measures likely to lessen the progress and abate the virulence of the disease.

The following proceedings were adopted in rapid succession, and in a few days the whole machinery was in full working order, and continued so as long as the necessity remained.

A circular note was sent to every medical man in the parish, requesting information should Cholera or Diarrhœa (in an unusually severe form) manifest itself; and the Committee, believing that premonitory Diarrhœa was generally found to precede the Choleraic attack, entered into an arrangement with the four district Parish Surgeons, whereby medicine and attendance (if required), and also a supply of chloride of lime, could be obtained, at any hour day or night, without an order. For twelve weeks this plan continued in operation, and with the greatest benefit. Not

only were more than 3,400 supplies of medicine given by them, but by their judicious investigation of, and prompt attention to, the cases as they presented themselves, the relief was almost universal; and during the whole of that period but 10 fatal cases occurred to them, viz., Cholera 7, Choleraic Diarrhœa 1, Diarrhœa 2.

With the Dispenser at the Dispensary by the Workhouse a similar arrangement was made, save and except that his duties in no way comprised attendance on the sick. From here were issued 4,305 supplies of Diarrhœa medicine properly labelled, besides chloride of lime. He was called up at night 79 times during the 16 weeks that the arrangement with him lasted.

Supplies of Diarrhœa Medicine were also sent to the various large Schools, National and otherwise, at which the children of the poor are educated. To provide for the knowledge amongst the poor of these means of obtaining early suitable medicine, 10,000 smaller bills were printed, containing this information as well as other useful hints, and three men were employed in distributing the bills throughout the poorer district especially.

Samples of disinfectants were obtained, and placed in my office for reference; and all information as to their use, as well as various circulars respecting water-filters, &c., were fixed in a conspicuous place, that no time should be lost in seeking to obtain the necessary knowledge.

The assistance of the Surveyor of Sewers was immediately proffered, and independent of a continued vigilance over the manner in which the various works under his jurisdiction were carried out, much good was done by the addition of carbolic acid to the lime applied to the castings from the gullies, and by the free use of a solution of the same acid in the gullies and public urinals.

The Surveyor of Roads also directed his attention to the scavenging of the streets, &c., and removed the handles from all the street pumps, so that no risk might be run from the use of water therefrom.

The limited accommodation at the Workhouse prevented any portion being assigned for Cholera cases (even if it were deemed advisable,) and it became necessary to take steps to inquire into the cost and character of temporary buildings, which might be erected on the vacant ground near the Workhouse; and for this purpose the Chairman of the Committee and myself made numerous inquiries, and also attended at the Tower, where, through the kind acquiescence of the Government, we were shown, and allowed to borrow, two Hospital Tents, which, being thus placed at our disposal, were forthwith erected on the ground before referred to, although happily no occasion for their use presented itself. Inquiries were also made at St. Thomas's Hospital, but no satisfactory arrangements could be entered into, chiefly owing to the insufficiency of the accommodation which could be given there; their resources being, in their temporary locale, but imperfectly developed.

The Governors and Guardians joined most heartily in promoting the various measures, precautionary and remedial, and liberal relief was given in all cases which at all threatened to assume the form of severe diarrhœa or cholera. Arrangements were also made for the more speedy interment of the dead.

So far, then, I have dealt with the Medical part of the question; it was felt, however, to be most important that the Sanitary condition of the dwellings of the parishioners should be investigated and recorded, so that sources of evil, almost unknown and unsuspected, might receive that early attention as would be serviceable alike during the present epidemic and in time to come; and for this purpose a house to house visitation

was commenced on August 4th and concluded on November 20th, in which period the Sub-Inspectors called at 12,919 houses. The extra staff thus employed consisted of four Sub-Inspectors, whose duty was to report as to the Interior, Roofage, and Ceilings, Yard, Drains, Closet, Water-supply, state of Water-butt or Cistern, and Dust-bin of each house so visited, adding any remarks as to nuisances wherever found to exist. From their books was daily entered a tabulated account; and wherever sanitary defects were found, sanitary notices were forthwith drawn up, and served the next day by the Street-keeper, who was directed to attend daily on Mr. Bell, the Inspector of Nuisances, for the purpose of receiving and delivering these orders. Two other men were also employed for some time, one to limewash urinals, and the other to clean out water-butts, &c.; and on the 25th of August another Sub-Inspector was engaged, whose duty was to visit houses, on the owners of which sanitary orders had been served, to ascertain how far the work had been carried out—the result has been, that of the 12,919, in 8463 some defects were found, many, it is true, such as would under no other circumstances have received attention; to remedy these no less than 3457 separate notices were issued. Dust and refuse was removed by order from 2293; 92 Urinals were limewashed, and 928 Waterbutts cleaned by our men.

As regards the orders for abatement of nuisances, it was evident in the onset that the notices hitherto used were so complicated as to prevent any but a few being issued daily; and therefore it was necessary to entirely remodel the forms, and the experience of the last few months has fully demonstrated the success of the alteration. We have now a record of the condition of nearly every house in the Parish (the exceptions will be alluded to presently,) and so arranged that a very few minutes will suffice for a reference to it, with information as to what Sanitary defects existed, and if they have been remedied—this latter information is gained by re-inspection, and 5448 have been revisited. It is

obvious, however, that many must be inspected several times before the works are satisfactorily completed, and I therefore trust that the services of two Sub-Inspectors will be allowed for a few months yet, in order that this most necessary and important re-visitation may be properly carried out.

In the parish not more than 824 open privies were found—viz., St. Mary's 97, Trinity 113, St. Paul's 60, and St. Peter's 554; and on revisiting, 89 have been found done away with since the orders—viz., St. Mary 21, Trinity 18, St. Peter's 50; 1841 houses were found at the second visit in a Sanitary condition, and 1861 were reported as undergoing repair; of the 12,919 houses, excluding the Vestry Hall and Workhouse, all but a very few were fully reported on; the exceptions were as follows:

Persons out at time of visit	- - - - -	356
„ refusing admission	- - - - -	27
„ objecting, as inconvenient at the time		8
Houses, empty	- - - - -	38
„ under repair	- - - - -	24
„ being rebuilt	- - - - -	11
„ shut up	- - - - -	11
„ burnt down	- - - - -	3
		<hr/>
		478

I have little doubt but that most of these will be properly inspected, and that the refusals will be succeeded by compliance. The house to house visitation has been carried out with but little real opposition, and with a great deal of satisfaction; the Sub-Inspectors have performed their duties with tact and consideration, and the value of the work I regard as incalculable, and moreover as permanent, for we possess a store of information such as every day must testify. To those few, and they are very few, who have expressed themselves rather warmly in opposition to the whole procedure, I would point out, that no great work like this can be satis-

factorily carried out unless strict impartiality be the rule of action, and unless all classes, and those in every station, be alike subject to inquiry ; and I would also say, that, in the face of so great an evil as Epidemic Cholera, excess of duty (if it exist, which I do not admit) is infinitely to be preferred to neglect, and that from every order issued there has been a ready and easy appeal to the Sanitary Committee, whose duties, I am happy to state, have received no accession by the receipt of such complaints.

Of the manner in which Mr. BELL, the Sanitary Inspector, has carried out the arduous work of superintending more immediately these operations, I cannot speak in terms of undue praise. In no way neglecting his regular official duties, he has devoted his evenings and nights to an uninterrupted performance of extra work, not only without a murmur, but with a zeal and in a way which would be equalled by but few, and surpassed by none. I can speak from the most perfect knowledge, he having submitted to me daily the details of the work, and consulted with me whenever difficulty arose. For three months and a half, an average of 140 houses were visited daily by the Sub-Inspectors ; every night Mr. BELL, with the aid of a clerk, examined their books, tabulated the result, and prepared the sanitary orders, so that the work was never in arrears ; and for three months also the lists had to be prepared for the Re-visiting Sub-Inspector, and in them were included 5448 houses. In mentioning these facts, I am but doing simple justice to a deserving officer.

Before dismissing this part of my report, I may add, that both the Water Companies were communicated with on the subject of the quality and quantity of the water supply, and every care and attention was promised by them. Considerable sewer works were being carried on in the Dover Road, and constant noxious effluvia were for a time unnecessarily allowed to poison the air around, causing much alarm ; by seeking the interference of the Metropolitan Board of Works, under whom the works were carried on, and

by close watching on the part of the officers of the Vestry, great improvement was effected, and whatever nuisance remained was really unavoidable.

During the whole period the ordinary sanitary work of the Parish continued, and all complaints received prompt attention.

It will be now advisable to devote a brief space to a consideration of the progress of the Epidemie, and of its extent in our Parish.

I have before said, that it was in July that the existence of Cholera was placed beyond all doubt, and in the week ending August 4th no less than 1053 deaths were recorded in London; for the next four weeks it rapidly declined; but from September 1st to October 20th it seemed to hang about, not varying much in the total, week by week, and certainly not presenting evidence of gradual decrease; since then, however, a more satisfactory state of things has existed, and the numbers now are very small. The virulence of the Epidemie was manifested in the East of London, as will be seen by the following table, and I would premise the remark that the term Cholera in the Returns includes Choleraie Diarrhoea.

	POPULATION Estimated to middle of 1866.	TOTAL DEATHS from CHOLERA from 1st July, when the Epidemic commenced, to 24th Nov. inclusive.	TOTAL DEATHS from DIARRHOEA from 1st July to 24th Nov. inclusive.
LONDON	3,037,991	5539	2607
WEST DISTRICTS ..	511,258	183	346
NORTH DISTRICTS ..	686,021	409	520
CENTRAL DISTRICTS ..	359,219	329	358
EAST DISTRICTS ..	607,945	3912	812
SOUTH DISTRICTS ..	873,548	706	571

The South, however, has not escaped unscathed, but the number of fatal cases therein has not shown much variation during a large proportion of the time ; thus, from July 21st to November 10th, the highest weekly mortality from Cholera was 50 and the lowest 33—Greenwich, Woolwich and Plumstead contributed a very large share of the deaths. In our Parish, from June 13th to November 12th, 24 fatal cases occurred, 19 being called Cholera, and 5 Choleraic Diarrhœa. Their ages were: under 1, 1; between 1 and 5, 5; 5 to 20, 2; 20 to 40, 7; 40 to 60, 8; 60 to 80, 1. Two occurred in St. Mary's District, 6 in Trinity, and 16 in St. Peter's. Two of the fatal cases of Choleraic Diarrhœa died in the Workhouse, but they were brought in suffering from it. The inmates, generally, were remarkably free from Diarrhœa, the diet was judiciously attended to, and the pea-soup omitted, and cocoa or coffee given instead of gruel at breakfast.

The cases in Newington were not to be traced to any particular cause; in some, drink, in others, want from improvidence, and dirt seemed to be likely causes. Three houses deserve special mention: 1st, 33, Smyrk's Road; in this house 3 fatal cases occurred, although one dying in Guy's Hospital is not included in the list; a child, 1 year old, suffering from diarrhœa and teething, was allowed to eat some pears, and the result was, death from Cholera in 3 days, viz. on September 5th; the Mother died on the 7th, after 36 hours, and the occupier of the house died on the 6th in Guy's Hospital. I could ascertain no local cause, no other cases in the neighbourhood—drains of house in good order, water cistern frequently cleaned out; bedding, &c., was destroyed. Again, at 29, Milk Street, on October 20th, two deaths occurred, (mother and daughter) from Choleraic Typhus; the one after 1 week, the other after 2 weeks illness. Here, also, I could find no sufficient cause; the people were poor, and the house not very clean, but the drains were in good order, and although water was

said to be under the floor, on examination this was found incorrect, the earth was perfectly dry, and no smell was detected. A very good Nurse was supplied to these people from the Workhouse, and liberal and generous diet allowed. On November 3rd, a boy aged 5, died at 37, Milk Street. I could not find a cause when I visited it on the 5th, having only a few minutes before been informed of it; here the picture of destitution was complete, but the man could have earned a fair livelihood; the house was thoroughly lime-washed, and a new water butt provided; and all went on well until the 11th, when I saw them all at mid-day, no complaint nor evidence of sickness; 3 hours after, the Mother was taken ill, and died in 16 hours; and the Father was attacked the next day and died in 12 hours; here also no defect of drainage could be detected; I have a suspicion that some of the things which were poisoned by the boy's evacuations, and which I could never find nor learn where they were, may have been used by the Mother and so given her the disease. The bodies were speedily interred, some of the children taken to the Workhouse, others to friends; the wretched rags, &c., all destroyed, the house emptied, disinfected, and kept unoccupied. In all the other cases, but one in each house was attacked, and it was in each a matter of great doubt as to the probable cause of the seizure.

The question naturally arises, how has Newington fared in the Epidemic of 1866 as compared with 1849 and 1854? the answer is a pleasing one—It has almost escaped. I have said that 24 cases have occurred in 1866, but in 1849 there were 907, and in 1854, 694. How comes this to pass? I do not consider it to be the place in this Report to go into the question of the terrible out-break in the East of London as compared with the other districts, but there are a few facts bearing on our own improvement which are worth mentioning. In the South of London two great Water Companies supplied the streets indiscriminately;

in 1849, they both drew their supplies from the River Thames, not very far from Battersea, and hence both used a polluted source; the mortality from Cholera was, of the Lambeth 12.5; of the Southwark and Vauxhall 11.8, to 1000 living; and from Diarrhœa 2.9 and 2.7. Between 1849 and 1854, the Lambeth Company went up to Ditton for their water, and in 1854, we find the death rate per 1000 to be :

Cholera, Lambeth	...	3.7	Southwark	...	13.0
Diarrhœa, „	...	2.1	„	...	3.3

How stands the case in 1866? has not the Southwark Company gone higher up the River too, and is not the mortality from Cholera in the South greatly diminished, and this in spite of the population of Newington increasing from 64,816 in 1850, to 82,220 in 1861. To this, and to the great Sanitary work that has been going on for the last ten years, such as the abolition of all the open ditches, the construction of the deep sewers and improved state of drainage, and the constant and early attention to nuisances wherever found to exist, I believe is to be attributed the improved state of things; not forgetting as well the prompt measures which were this year set in force with the object of vigorously combating the enemy.

There is still much to be done; nuisances must be sought out and removed, the dwellings of the poor increased in number and improved, an amendment in the whole system of water supply must also ere long do its part, and we may then hope that not only each successive Epidemic of Cholera may be less and less virulent, and the means of opposing it be better understood, but that Fever and such other devastating diseases, may become less and less severe.

One other point must not be omitted. The advantage of early information of fatal cases of Cholera was most important, and the Registrar-General has done essential service by the publication of,

at first, a Cholera Gazette, so to say, and then, on the 4th of August, of a Daily Return, which has been regularly received by me; for which, and for the courteous attention paid to all communications, I think the Vestry would do well to send a vote of thanks.

Before concluding, I would desire to record my thanks to Mr. GABB and Mr. PORTER, Relieving Officers, and to Mr. WHITE, the Master of the Workhouse, for their ready and unremitting exertions and co-operation.

In the appendix will be found numerous tables, setting forth the progress and extent of the sanitary work, the medical relief afforded by the parish surgeons and dispensers, ages at death, daily returns, comparative mortality in the London Districts, also in the Southern Parishes, the list of fatal cases in Newington, and a large number of printed documents bearing on the prevention and relief of the disease.

But one word more. Recognising in the recent Epidemic of Cholera the hand of an overruling Providence, working by natural means, and teaching us that there are Sanitary Laws and Sanitary Duties, the due attention to which is as incumbent on us, as the neglect will be ever detrimental, I cannot but express the conviction that out of evil will work good, and the hope that increased attention to those sanitary requirements so necessary amongst and around us, and a deeper and more earnest practical sympathy with our poorer brethren, will be the result of

“THE CHOLERA EPIDEMIC OF 1866.”

Yours obediently,

WILLIAM TIFFIN ILIFF, M.D.,

Medical Officer of Health.

November 27th, 1866.